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**Community-Based
Producer
Organizations: A
Contribution to the
West Africa Regional
Program Action Plan
for the Initiative to End
Hunger in Africa.**

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1. POLICY BACKGROUND OBSERVATIONS

Beginning in the 1980s, most governments in the sub-region began adopting a relatively uniform set of fiscal and economic policies that included the liberalization of agricultural marketing. Specific reforms differ from country to country, but commonly include measures to encourage greater private sector participation in agricultural marketing functions, the reduction or elimination of public subsidies for agricultural input and product marketing, and agricultural export diversification.

As government agencies have withdrawn from the market, both governments and donor agencies continue to promote a wide variety of producer organizations to fill the gaps in government services. Although reforms have been implemented in a number of countries, the legacy of governmental paternalism has not been easy to shed. Government officers, whether in research or extension services continue to be reluctant to turn over responsibilities to producers. Moreover, rarely do the reforms challenge the continued influence of traditional village elite in producer organizations. Furthermore, few, if any, reform programs have successfully addressed the endemic under-capitalization and limited management skills that have always threatened the viability of producer groups in the sub-region. Finally, many groups are tied directly to donor agency financed international and national NGO programs. As a result, they are primarily loose groupings of farmers created principally (and opportunistically) to gain access to production credit and supplies; they rarely continue when the donors shift their funding and program priorities.

The recent World Bank paper, *From Action to Impact: The Africa Region's Rural Strategy*, nicely summarizes conventional wisdom concerning the contribution of “voluntary producers’ organizations” to rural development. As part of the “institutional foundation” of rural development, “producers’ organizations amplify the political voice of smallholder producers, reduce the costs of marketing of inputs and outputs, and provide a forum for members to share information, coordinate activities and make collective decisions. Producers’ organizations create opportunities for producers to get more involved in value-adding activities such as input supply, credit, processing, marketing and distribution”¹. The acknowledgement that farmers’ organizations might contribute to amplifying the political voice of small farmers is an important step forward in thinking about the complementarities between political power and markets.

Current national and regional networks of producer organizations in West Africa tend to be composed of a mix of at least three types of groups. The mix of these different types will be important in designing effective support strategies.

1.1 Largely Commercial Groups

Members of this type of group tend to operate largely commercial, export-oriented farms. These farms are usually run by retired civil servants, including school teachers, and the retirement income

¹ World Bank (2002). *From Action to Impact: The Africa Region's Rural Strategy*. Washington, DC, The World Bank, Rural Development Operations, the Africa Region: 16

provides them the ability to be well capitalized². When groups are composed largely of producers who represent this kind of farm type, member relationships are commonly ‘contractual’ since group membership offers a collective opportunity for each member to protect shared, and largely commercial, interests. Most export crop cooperatives fall into this category.

1.2 Mixed Farming Groups

This type of group tends to be built around the protection of members’ interests in one cash crop. But, in contrast to the largely commercial groups, the members tend to operate small-scale, diversified production enterprises that are less highly capitalized. In addition, members of this type of group depend less heavily upon marketing a single commodity as the principal source of farm income. A wide range of groups engaged in various types of contractual production and marketing programs are commonly found in this category.

1.3 Subsistence-Oriented, Mixed Farming Groups

A wide variety of self-help or mutual labor associations illustrate this type of group. These groups are usually village- or community-based, and they are built commonly around customary principles or ideas of promoting and protecting individual and collective well-being. Members operate farm enterprises that are characterized by very low levels of capitalization and they do not rely on the market as a principal source of farm income. Non-tradable commodities tend to dominate their production systems and labor may be the primary and often only asset. Non-governmental organizations and government agencies tend to be involved in establishing these kinds of groups.

This typology offers one means to understand the involvement of different types of producer groups in agricultural marketing, agro-enterprises and in technology development. Producer groups whose members’ enterprises are highly capitalized and who produce for a highly competitive market are usually interested in seeking ways to be involved in marketing and/or controlling important phases of agricultural technology development. Since the profitability of the members’ enterprises depends largely on assured access to markets and on assuring the use of the most highly productive, and cost-effective technology, members should be expected to act as market entrepreneurs and to push their group to stay in front of the ‘technology development curve.’ Similarly, these largely commercial-based groups will not only be more aware of how policy changes affect their role in marketing and technology development, but they will tend to have the capacity to take action to protect their interests. In addition, groups with highly commercialized interests tend to attract greater attention by government decision-makers.

As the level of capitalization and degree of dependence on the market among members declines, producer groups tend to take a more limited, discrete and functional role in marketing and technology development. The activities in which groups become involved usually reflect the most immediate and concrete interests of their members. For example, organizations comprised of largely mixed farming enterprises that are highly capitalized and which rely on marketing at least one cash crop might see

² Large plantations as found in Ghana or Côte d’Ivoire would be at one end of the continuum of this category; more frequently found are larger (10+ hectare) fruit and cotton farms that often rely on tractor power.

joint marketing or the promotion of improved cultivation practices as an effective way to maintain their competitive edge.

1.4 Producer Organizations and Policies

When considering the opportunities that producers networks confront, and the ways in which these networks might be supported in order to work more effectively with producer organizations in the sub-region, it is useful to distinguish among the types of policies in which different types of groups might become involved. *Economic, fiscal and financial policies* include the national and international dimensions of commodity and input prices as well as taxes and tariffs on goods and supplies. *Technology policies* deal primarily with the priorities for the development and use of biological, chemical and mechanical technology. Finally, *institutional policies* include the rules, norms and procedures such as those addressing land use and tenure laws, as well as the agencies that deal with activities, including extension, research, marketing and the delivery of rural services.

Some types of policy are more susceptible to influence by producer organizations than others. Most groups find it difficult to influence all types, and few are skilled in influencing economic, fiscal and financial policies. The more highly capitalized, or commercially based groups tend to have a comparative advantage over less highly capitalized groups in lobbying. But all groups usually find the need to create coalitions with other groups, NGOs, etc. in order to influence policy. In addition, different policies compel farmer groups to confront the countervailing pressures of other, and perhaps better-organized groups in society. For example, urban-based, consumer groups commonly win the debate over food pricing policy. As a result of these kinds of hurdles, small producer organizations tend to limit their “policy concerns” to assuring access to agricultural services or to improving the terms upon which such services are delivered.

1.5 Historical Background

Villager and producer organizations have been active in networks across the Sahel and West Africa since the early 1970s. The two best known networks that helped to form several current farmer-leaders or lay the foundation for new networking initiatives are **INADES-Formation**, and the *Association Internationale Six-S* (*Se Servir de la Saison Sèche en Savane et au Sahel*), which was established in 1976 in response to the mid-1970s drought, and involved village, producer and NGO leaders from Burkina Faso, Senegal, Benin, Mali, Togo, Niger, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau and the Gambia.

Since the late 1970s and into the 1980s, producer organizations in West Africa arose and evolved largely in response to broader economic, agricultural and rural development policy changes driven by economic structural adjustment and steps toward governmental decentralization. The Senegalese network or Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations (FONGS) established in 1978, and initially influenced by the Six-S Association, was one of the most well-known of this generation of national networks of village-based and smallholder producer organizations.

By the early 1990s, and as the second wave of democratization spread across West Africa, the CILSS/Club du Sahel brought together several separate, yet related West African groups (e.g., FONGS, or the newly established Malian cotton farmers’ union, SYCOV), as well as European-based

non-governmental groups that supported various types of local organizations and networks, to launch and provide financial support for an informal “Plate-forme” of producer organizations in CILSS-member countries³. These investments, and the experiences gained in coordinating producer groups across the Sahel since the 1970s, contributed directly to the creation of ROPPA.

2. PRODUCER ORGANIZATION NETWORKS IN WEST AFRICA - OVERVIEW

There are two major types of networks of producer organizations that are active in the West Africa sub-region.

The first type includes those based in the sub-region:

- **ROPPA** (*Le Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest*), created in July 2000, and with a headquarters recently opened in Ouagadougou, this network brings together representatives of farmers' organizations from: Bénin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambie, Guinée, Guinée-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Sénégal, and Togo; and it plans to expand its membership to farmers' associations from the ECOWAS member countries.
- **INADES-Formation**, headquartered in Côte d'Ivoire and with national programs since the 1970s in Cameroon, Chad, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, and,
- **The Regional Network Project of Chambers of Agriculture** (PRIECA/AO, *Projet pour le renforcement de l'Interface entre Etat et Chambre d'Agriculture de l'Afrique de l'Ouest*), supported by the CMA/ADC, *La Conférence des Ministres de l'Agriculture de l'Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre*⁴, or the regional conference of the Ministers of Agriculture of West and Central Africa; the project includes national chamber affiliates in Mali, Togo, Bénin, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, as well as Niger and Burkina Faso where legislation creating chambers is pending.
- **INTERFACE**, established in 1997 as part of the CILSS Sahel 21 initiative, is based in Ouagadougou in order to encourage collaboration among many women-led small agri-businesses and micro-enterprises, unions, cooperatives and NGOs. The network seeks to identify and expand marketing opportunities, as well as improve business skills and capacity of its member groups.
- **REFESA**, *Réseau des Femmes Sahéliennes*, was established 1997 as part of the CILSS Sahel 21 initiative for the purpose of strengthening national networks of women in each CILSS-member country.

Supportive of the above networks are two additional regional network organizations:

³ The Plate-forme emerged from the CILSS/Club du Sahel-sponsored 1994 Praia Conference on Land Tenure and Decentralization and the follow-on 1996 meeting in Koudougou, Burkina Faso.

⁴ The CMA/ADC, established in 1991 by 14 West African and 6 Central African governments, is the one regional governmental organization that is concerned with producer organizations, agricultural development and the creation of a regional agricultural market.

- **FRAO/WARF**, the West Africa Rural Foundation in Dakar, whose goal is to help rural communities develop their own resources and capacities for achieving a greater measure of self-sufficiency, and,
- **CORAF/WE CARD**, the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development, established in 1987 by representatives from the national agricultural research institutes from 14 countries, seeks to improve the capacity of agricultural research throughout the region.

The second type of network includes those based in Europe and working directly with the Africa-based networks and/or with members of these networks. These Europe-based networks include:

- **APM-Afrique** (*Agricultures-Paysannes-Sociétés et Mondialisation-Afrique*) sponsored principally by the foundation, *Charles Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l'Homme* (FPH) in Paris with additional financial support from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union, IFAD, CTA and the Gaia Foundation
- **IFAP/FIAP**, (The International Federation of Agricultural Producers) based in Paris and with 100 national organizations of “family farmers” in 71 countries; most of the member groups in West Africa are associate members and include those agricultural and development groups who work on behalf of farmers
- **ICA**, (International Cooperative Alliance) a Geneva-based international non-governmental organization that unites, represents and serves co-operatives worldwide. It is closely affiliated with the Geneva-based partnership, COPAC (The Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives) of representatives of the cooperative movement, farmers’ organizations (e.g, IFAP), the UNDP, the FAO and the ILO in order promote and coordinate sustainable cooperative development through policy dialogues, technical cooperation and information, and concrete collaborative activities.
- **Agri-Terra** founded in 1997 as a non-governmental network to promote, facilitate and support cooperation between “rural people’s organizations” in the Netherlands and in developing countries.
- **Inter-Réseaux-Développement Rural** (Paris) seeks to encourage and sustain discussions of a wide range of rural development issues (in a global context) and information exchange among grassroots activists in Africa. Created in 1996 from the merger of three networks *Groupements Associations Villageoises et Organisations Paysannes (GAO)*; *Recherche-Développement (RD)*; and *Stratégies Alimentaires (SA)*, the Inter-Réseaux is based in Paris and funded by principally by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGCID/DCT/EPS).

3. STATUS OF EXISTING REGIONAL AND NATIONAL NETWORKS

In addition to continued economic structural adjustment policies, and especially continued agricultural sector reforms, producer organizations and networks operate in a new context of global competitiveness between Northern and Southern farmers, as well as continued but variable democratization and governmental decentralization. Different producer organization networks respond to these opportunities in different ways.

3.1 ROPPA

In July 2000 representatives of producer organizations from Bénin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambie, Guinée, Guinée-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Sénégal, and Togo met in Cotonou in order to establish a new type of West African network to focus on the role of producer organizations in context of West African regional integration. Building on many shared experiences through networking activities sponsored by CILSS/Club du Sahel or various European groups (APM-Afrique, Inter-Réseaux, etc.) these representatives sought to create a sub-regional capacity to represent smallholder producer interests in rural development and agricultural policy discussions held under the auspices of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA)⁵.

In this sub-regional framework, ROPPA members are committed to:

- promoting the values of smallholder (peasant) agriculture as the basis of family agriculture⁶;
- assuring the best use and sharing of information about different experiences of members;
- helping organizations in each country become more involved in national policy making; and,
- encouraging solidarity among organizations and growers, including representation at regional and international arenas and cooperation with other regional organizations.

More specifically, ROPPA seeks to create a policy voice for West African smallholders in discussions to standardize the Common Exterior Tariff, OHADA and judicial systems, and the preparation of a sub-regional Agricultural Policy. In order to develop this policy voice, ROPPA recognizes the opportunities provided across West Africa as more countries decentralize government administration and thereby create the occasion for more grassroots actors to become involved in policy. At the same time ROPPA recognizes that these actors require new capacities for this kind of involvement. In response, ROPPA seeks to:

- reinforce the establishment of a farmer *plateforme* or coordinating/federating body in each country;
- strengthen the capacity of national level groups in each country to become involved in policy making; and
- move producer organizations from a production-only focus to a concern with policy issues.

ROPPA is governed by a sub-regional “Convention” or Conference composed of 7 delegates from each country. Each country delegation must be representative of the diversity of farmer groups in the country and include at least one women representative. The Conference is expected to meet at least twice a year. The Executive Committee, composed of 10 members, two of which must be women, is elected for 3 years and is responsible for management and implementation of Conference decisions. After working out of the CNCR offices in Dakar since 2000, the ROPPA Executive Committee

⁵ ROPPA is considering how to expand its membership to producer organizations from the ECOWAS member countries.

⁶ This objective specifically and deliberately sets ROPPA apart from efforts to promote commodity-based groups and networks, especially for cotton.

recently established its own regional office, including a small a technical support group, in Ouagadougou⁷.

With start-up funding from several of its partners, the ROPPA Executive Committee devoted its efforts throughout 2001 to setting up its network across the region and participating in the development of an agricultural policy for the UEMOA that reflects the importance of the farm family and the need to focus on how support for agriculture contributes to redistribution, instead of just accumulation of income. Specifically, ROPPA has sought to bring this orientation into agricultural research and extension in Senegal through ANCAR.

Specific ROPPA programs designed to help it achieve its overall objectives include the establishment of a Regional Fund (*Le Fonds sous régional pour le renforcement des capacités des OP*) that would be managed by the African Development Bank in Lomé and designed as a support fund to strengthen the capacity of national producer organizations to become effectively involved in national policy discussions, but within a regional and international perspective. The Fund is expected to be operational in 2003 and it is currently supported by Swiss Cooperation, SOS Faim, Agri-Terra, French Cooperation. Additional assistance is expected from the Club du Sahel, as well as from Luxemburg, Holland and Canada.

In addition, ROPPA seeks to establish what it calls the Rural Identity Card, or a grassroots information system that is helpful directly to farmer's groups in participating in policy-making decisions and setting priorities, and the *DABA*, or an alliance of farmers and artisans to create a regional finance structure that responsive to their needs.

ROPPA plans to organize a roundtable meeting of ROPPA partners during 2003, but meanwhile most of its partners meet regularly as the Brussels Group (Groupe de Bruxelles. This group includes NGOs and several government agencies in Europe that have collaborated in various ways for about 10 years in support of farmer associations, and who have most recently started supporting ROPPA. The group meets informally to discuss their continuing work in support of farmer associations, to exchange experiences and information, and to review their lobbying and advocacy role regarding donor policies in support of producer organizations. As a result of support from several Brussels Group NGOs (Agri-Terra, SOS-Faim, Italian NGOs), ROPPA has also gained access to policy forums such as the European Union, FAO, and other European and international professional agricultural groups.

3.2 Chambers of Agriculture

With support from the FAO since the mid-1990s, several countries, Mali, Togo, Bénin, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, have established national networks of regional Chambers of Agriculture. Legislation is pending in Niger to create similar consular bodies; with support from the FAO since 1998, Burkina Faso expects to complete the regional elections for each regional chamber in a newly established national network of Chambers by the end of 2003. Through the recent **PRIECA/AO**, (*Projet pour le renforcement de l'Interface entre Etat et Chambre d'Agriculture de l'Afrique de l'Ouest*), the West African Council of Ministers of Agriculture is attempting to reinforce the capacity of these bodies in each country.

⁷ The Executive Committee also has an advisory committee composed of representatives of partner groups and resource people.

Nevertheless, in each country the Chambers are almost completely lacking in any analytical capacity to serve as effective consular bodies and most farmers and producer organization leaders are wary of the representative function of these bodies since they continue to be staffed by seconded civil servants.

The Chamber of Agriculture in Mali has been established the longest and it illustrates the range of issues raised by these bodies in West Africa.

3.3 Mali Case Study

In 1993 APCAM (The Permanent Assembly of the Chambers of Agriculture) and the nine Regional Chambers of Agriculture were created as Mali's only legally recognized consultative and professional bodies of agricultural interests. Since their establishment, the APCAM and Chambers have earned a widely accepted reputation as representatives of a broad range of Malian agricultural interests in local, regional and national-level discussions with government ministries and administrators. Local (*cercle*) and regional chambers regularly help local producers deal with a wide variety of immediate and specific concerns issues related to agricultural research, production and marketing. At the same time, APCAM plays an important national level role in mediating many contentious issues among actors in the agricultural sector, as well as participating in most agricultural policy discussions, such as land tenure reform and the review of cooperative regulations, among others.

After several years of technical support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, a multi-donor project, *Projet d'Appui aux Services Agricoles et aux Organisations Paysannes (PASAOP)* was designed to strengthen this representative and policy-making role of the APCAM and the Chambers of Agriculture. Specifically the project seeks to improve both APCAM's and the Chambers' professional consultative capacity as well as their information and communication activities.

As currently conceived, however, this project does not adequately address the challenges that Mali's new, decentralized system of territorial administration poses to the political position enjoyed by the Chambers. First, the project does not specifically address critical organizational needs of the chambers at the level of the *cercle* or the *commune*. Second, the project seeks to strengthen the representative role of the Chamber. But it does not address the implications for the Chambers to play this role effectively with the new decentralized collective bodies that no longer provide the regional or local (*cercle*) Chambers clearly defined opportunities (such as the former local or regional development committees, CLDs or CRDs) to participate in local development policy-making.

In order for the Chambers to fulfill their professional consultative role in Mali's new decentralized system, they will need the capacity to take a more proactive advocacy approach to the planning and decision-making in the new *communes*, the *conseils de cercle* and the regional assemblies. More broadly for the Chambers to play a constructive and active role in achieving the promises of decentralization, they will need both the capacity to reach out to the wide range of agricultural interests in Mali and to redefine and reformulate their representative and advocacy role. In short, if the Chambers are to respond successfully to the challenges of decentralization, they need to use privileged corporatist-like relationship with government to build themselves into an independent group that represents agricultural interests in Mali.

Established by law as a consultative body to speak on behalf of the country's agricultural interests, the Chamber (APCAM and the Regional Chambers) enjoys a privileged position in agricultural and rural development policy deliberations and conflict resolution. On an almost daily basis, both well-organized agriculture and livestock cooperatives, as well as village-level associations of small-scale producers request the elected regional or *cercle* Chamber presidents to address a wide range of their problems and concerns. The government as well looks to the Chamber for policy advice and for assistance in dealing with critical issues such as the continuing 'cotton crisis.'

3.4 The Challenge of Decentralization

In its legally authorized representative and consular role for Malian agricultural interests, the Chamber responds to government requests and can submit questions and advice concerning agricultural and rural development to the government. In addition to the organizational and political challenges inherent in advising government and representing interests across four sectors, the Chamber, especially at the regional and local levels, confronts another and potentially more complex, set of issues in Mali's new system of decentralized administration.

The Chamber, as the country's legally recognized body to speak for the *monde rural*, continues to enjoy well-defined points of access to government decision-makers, especially at the national level. Dramatic changes in the decentralized regional and local deliberative and policy-making structures, however, have eliminated privileged points of access for Chamber representatives at the regional and *cercle* levels. Elected communal and *cercle* councils and the regional assemblies have replaced the local and regional development committees on which the Chamber was once represented. Consequently, while local level government officials and producers still rely on Chamber staff and representatives for short-term problem-solving, the new decentralized representative structures no longer reserve a place for the Chamber in their policy-making deliberations.

Opportunities to inform elected representatives and speak for rural interests exist at the communal, *cercle* and regional levels. As the communal councils prepare their annual development programs for example, representatives of the Chamber from villages within the commune could help to assure that council members have information that might inform their decision-making. The *Conseils de Cercles* apparently will establish their own "technical services" to help inform delegates at this level. The President of the *Cercle* Chamber of Agriculture clearly would be in an excellent position to inform the technical advisor for agricultural and rural development of critical issues of importance to the Chamber. Similarly, the Regional Assemblies will establish various "working commissions" that will require access to information for their decision-making. For example, the Segou Chamber of Agriculture could become a key resource for the Assembly's *Commission Chargé du Monde Rural, de la Protection de l'Environnement, de l'Organisation des Activités de la Production Rurale et de l'Aménagement*.

These kinds of changes, however, suggest that the Chamber's continued effectiveness in regional and local policy-making will depend upon its ability to act more as an interest group that not only represents a point of view, but provides information to decision-makers. In other words, the future consultative role of the Chamber will depend less on its performance as a "transmission belt" between

government and the rural world, and more on its capacity to lobby and to be of service to local, elected decision-makers.

3.5 Representation and Advocacy

There are three types of limitations on the Chamber's capacity for advocacy. First, the vertical flow of information between the regional and *cercle* offices is limited at best. Serious communication and logistic constraints significantly impede the effective exchange of ideas and concerns between regional and *cercle* levels of the Chamber. The horizontal flow of information is similarly limited or non-existent. Neither the regions nor the *cercles* within a region have a means for regularly sharing information or discussing their activities and problems.

Second, government seconded civil servants assure the technical backstopping for the elected officials at the national, regional and local levels. Many technical positions remain to be filled, and the experience, as well as the interest and enthusiasm of the seconded technicians for the work of the Chamber vary widely. Numerous external demands on the time of both staff and elected representatives seriously affect the regularity of staff meetings, and both budget and logistic limitations preclude regular exchanges among Chamber staff and representatives within the regions. Consequently, the technical capacity of the Chamber to identify policy concerns and constraints, as well as propose policy options remains at best limited.

Third, and closely linked to the Chamber's weak technical capacity, the Chamber lacks a mechanism for systematically identifying and formulating the issues and policies that cut across diverse sectoral interests. Such a capacity will be necessary for the Chamber to develop an effective program of support that is recognized as valuable by sectoral-based professional organizations.

As a result of these weaknesses, Chamber Presidents constantly find themselves in a reactive, almost fire-fighting mode, rather than in a proactive mode. Most their problem-solving remains localized, even though a specific and immediate problem may be simply a manifestation of a much larger policy issue that should receive the attention of government officials. Thus, if the Chamber expects to continue playing a valued role in regional and local level policy deliberations, it will need to assure the flow and exchange of information within and among the local chambers, as well as its access to quality technical staff.

3.6 Family Farming or Professional Organizations

In contrast to most types of farmer groups – associations, *tons villageois*, cooperatives, *GIEs*, etc. – the Chamber is not a membership organization. Instead of members (*adherents*), the Chamber speaks for, and is mandated to support both individual *ressortissants*, as well as those representing what are termed “professional interests” in the agricultural, livestock, fisheries and forestry sectors. In order to meet this objective, the Chamber maintains an inventory of the “professional associations” active in each *cercle* and region⁸. This inventory, however, provides only address and basic identification

⁸ The PASAOP identifies professional agricultural organizations (OPAs) as all farmer organizations that are associative, mutualist, cooperative, union or private in nature. This deceptively appealing bureaucratic shorthand denomination (OPA) diverts attention away from consideration of the significant political and

information (name, registration number) for each association. As such, these inventories can serve only as the most elementary point of departure for developing any program of support to these groups or providing useful information to decision-makers.

Over the last 10 years there has been a veritable explosion of largely NGO-supported farmer and village groups throughout the country⁹. Depending on the concentration of NGOs in a region, it is common to find farmers who ‘belong’ to four, five or six associations. In fact in some areas, so many little projects have come and gone for so long that farmers joke about just waiting for the next project or group to join. As the number and types of local level groups continues to multiply in the regions, the Chamber will need to improve the quality of its inventories. First, a more detailed and descriptive inventory organized in a relational database is indispensable for identifying and carrying out a support program. Second, and equally important, such an inventory will be an important source of information for helping the Chamber develop its (new) representational role at the local level.

3.7 Democratization and Decentralization

It is difficult to generalize how peasants see the process of democratization, much less territorial decentralization in Mali. It is probably safe to suggest, however, that democracy and decentralization mean little or nothing in the everyday lives of the vast majority of Malians in rural areas. A small and growing group of smallholders – literate, often educated and members of farmer unions – are beginning to recognize and act upon their role as rural citizens. For this group, open and democratic elections, or opportunities to have problems addressed by the Chamber are welcome, but reflect only the surface of democracy. Smallholders demand a deeper democracy built around at least two guarantees. First, they seek a guarantee for their interests to be truly represented in those professional associations that currently speak in their name. Second, they seek the means to hold government technical services and agencies responsive and accountable. In particular, many smallholders see the cotton and rice parastatals as “islands of the past” in the sea of democracy.

The future of democratic development in Mali will depend on the ways in which the process of decentralization allows smallholders to develop and become respected as citizens with legitimate interests and concerns vis-à-vis government technical services and agencies. Unless smallholders begin to have a concrete means of holding these services and agencies accountable through their elected decentralized bodies, they will quickly see Malian democracy as one more empty, unfulfilled promise.

Since 1991, the Chamber – at both national and local levels – has played an important role in the emergence of the farmers’ movement; this movement represents an important effort by smallholders to gain a real measure of accountability from parastatal development agencies as well as government technical services and agencies. The statutory position of the Chamber has facilitated its consultative

policy implications represented by the fundamentally different ways in which the members of each group contribute to, and control capital formation and distribution.

⁹ As the PASAOP notes, however, the distribution of NGO activities diverges widely from region to region
République du Mali, M. D. R. (2000). Programme d’Appui aux Services Agricoles et aux Organisations Paysannes (PASAOP). Bamako, Secrétariat Général, Cellule de Planification et de Statistique.

role in negotiating the demands of the unions with the government. But based on the Chamber's statutory position, the government also expects significant conformity between the Chamber's activities and positions and government policy.

Consequently, if the Chamber seeks to continue to play a legitimate role in representing a wide variety of rural interests – some of which may run directly contrary to government positions – it will need to establish its policy independence and autonomy from government. As the emergence and policy role of other cross-cutting farmer organizations, such as the *Cooordination Nationale des Organisations Professionnelles Paysannes (CNOP)* indicates, the Chamber can no longer rely on its statutory position to guarantee its legitimacy with smallholders. Having the capacity to identify local level interests and concerns as well as its own policy analysis capacity would help the Chamber establish the kind of independence needed to define its legitimate role.

Similarly, this type capacity will also permit local Chambers to assure that the smallholder concerns and interests of the *monde rural* get expressed. With a capacity to listen to concerns expressed in the villages and communes, and to identify those day-to-day problems and concerns that are manifestations of larger policy issues, local chambers have a unique opportunity to help deepen Malian democracy.

3.8 INTERFACE

This loose network of smaller agri-business groups, many of which are women's groups involved in various kinds of agro-food processing, arose from the 1994 CILSS Sahel 21 initiative to launch a closer association with a range of civil society organizations.

The overall objectives of this network align closely with those of ROPPA and include a focus on strengthening member business and management skills as well as promoting national policies that encourage the emergence of agro-entrepreneurs both nationally and across the sub-region. More specifically, the network is interested in projects and policies that facilitate its members' access to: credit; national, regional and international markets; improved technical information (especially from agricultural research); and, processing technology. While this network is still very much in its formative stages, its affiliation with several regional and international forums is a first step toward the achievement of some of these objectives. For example, the network participates in: the CILSS-sponsored Private Sector *Plateforme* and the ACP Business Forum (Brussels); the ACP Science and Technology Group; the CILSS Food Security Coordinating Committee (*Comité de Concertation de Sécurité Alimentaire/CILSS*); and, the Sub-Saharan Africa Forum for Agricultural Research (FARA).

In contrast to most other networks, Interface is represented beyond the CILSS-member states and includes national committees in: Bénin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo. There is considerable disparity in the business skills, experience, and interests among the national member groups that this network tries to accommodate. Meanwhile, these national members rely on the existence of the network as a source of support in: creating and strengthening their national organizations; lobbying for small-scale credit and savings programs; improving transportation infrastructure; finding business partners; participating in national and regional exhibitions; locating improved processing technology; undertaking a region-

wide survey of food and agricultural grades and standards that are important for improving agricultural trade.

3.9 INADES-Formation

INADES-Formation, or the African Institute for Economic and Social Development – African Training Center) is a non-profit organization that is legally established in the Côte d’Ivoire with national offices in 10 countries, including Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire and Togo. It also operates in Bénin, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Senegal.

Established in the early 1970s, INADES-Formation promotes adult training, self-help and education programs based on techniques and methods that enable adults to analyze together their situation, identify appropriate solutions within their own means, and organize as a community to voice their concerns and become engaged in policy discussions. Programs are based upon and seek to express local knowledge and expertise as well as preserve natural resources. In addition to a cadre of about 250 women and men trainers from a variety of disciplines, the network has an extensive range of training and educational materials (booklets, technical leaflets, posters, slides, radio broadcasts, etc.) available in English, French and Jula. Training activities are directed to rural people in general, but also to specific categories such as members of producer organizations, rural adult trainers and to non-governmental organizations. All INADES-Formation programs depend upon external financial support through projects or from among their 30 partner support groups.

Selected Country Programs – Brief Descriptions

Burkina Faso. Since 1975, the priority fields of intervention in Burkina have been: soil degradation control, farmer organizations, women’s participation in development, and civic education. The program has a staff of 21, among whom 10 are trainers. Specific projects include: village water supply financed by the IDB; an Acacia albida project supported by the Jean Paul II Foundation; and a training program for producer organizations funded by Intermon and US for Africa.

Chad. Established in 1978, the Chad program focuses on environmental protection, sustainable agriculture, producer organizations, civic education, women and income generating activities. The program has a staff of 37, among whom 17 are trainers.

Côte d’Ivoire. Also established in 1978, the national program in Côte d’Ivoire has included projects that support producer organizations, environment/soil fertility, and food crops marketing. The staff of 17 included 8 trainers. Some of their projects included: a training program for CIDT agricultural advisers, the integrated development of Bonoua, a young farmer settlement project in Guiglo, and the diagnosis of training needs and development of a program for SODEPRA staff.

4. WOMEN’S ASSOCIATIONS

Togo. Stated in 1972, the Togo program is among the oldest national INADES programs. With a staff of 25, including 10 trainers, this program supports projects in environment and deforestation, village water supply, crop and income management, and civic education. Training projects have included a World Bank funded project to re-train agricultural agents and a UNFPA supported training program for women *animatrices* in the Togo Ministry of Women’s Advancement.

4.1 REFESA, Réseau des Femmes Sahéliennes

This regional network of Sahelian women emerged from the CILSS-sponsored Sahel 21. The network is based in Dakar but operates through national network committees (*Cadre de concertation du Comité National REFESA*) in each country. Similar to ROPPA, this network seeks to develop the operational and policy capacity of women's groups in each country with a particular emphasis on issues such as health, the environment and renewable energy, small-scale agricultural processing, and new entrepreneurial opportunities for women.

Unlike ROPPA, there is a huge difference between REFESA's proposed program and its actual activities. Without the benefit of long years of "networking" among themselves and with numerous European NGOs and donor agencies, this network lacks the experiential and support base for taking the initiative to launch its proposed programs.

Perhaps even more than ROPPA, the member organizations from each country may be individually more influential in their respective countries than the network is on a region-wide basis. For example, the two major women's groups, the FNGPF, the *Fédération Nationale des Groupements Féminines*, and the DIRFEL, the *Directoire de Femmes en Elevage*, are members of the influential CNCR, *Conseil National de Concertation et de Coopération des Ruraux*. The FNGPF includes about 1,000,000 women and seeks to improve members access to credit and to facilitate marketing. The DIRFEL has about 15,000 members interested in improved milk production and processing, as well as on-farm cattle fattening and poultry programs.

Status in Mali of: CAFO, *Coordination des Associations et ONG Féminines*, and COFEM, the *Collectif des Femmes du Mali*.

5. ROPPA AND REFESA - SPECIFIC CAPACITY ISSUES

5.1 Decision-Making Processes

The network's principal strengths derive from its capacity to speak in the name of the sub-regions' producers in important regional policy-making settings such as the UEMOA, and to have access to international forums such as NEPAD and groups associated with the European Community. ROPPA's successes in bringing agricultural import tariffs to the attention of the UEMOA, as well as the establishment of a regional support fund under the auspices of the African Development Bank, are significant – if not landmark – accomplishments, due as much to the establishment of producer organization representation in the member countries as to the long experience and expertise of the network's leadership.

5.2 National Depth

Without question, ROPPA has been instrumental in establishing national coordinating bodies of producer organizations in each of its 10 member countries. This work built heavily upon the earlier investments led by the Club du Sahel in creating national *plateformes*. But ROPPA has taken the next critical step in this process by helping the national coordinating bodies to become officially recognized or to obtain juridical approval, an indispensable step for any producer organization to participate in governmental policy discussions.

Part of ROPPA's mission involves the development of more productive relationships with its national members, and it is somewhat premature to evaluate the "depth" of these relationships, that vary widely from country to country, at this early stage in ROPPA's program. The significant overlap between ROPPA's Executive Committee and the CNCR in Senegal helps to assure a close working relationship. In contrast, ROPPA finds itself in the middle of a major policy controversy concerning producer organizations in Burkina Faso.

ROPPA continues to be represented in Burkina Faso by FENOP, the *Fédération Nationale des Organisations Paysannes* that was created in 1996. Its members include about 200 unions of producer organizations covering approximately 500,000 peasant farmers. FENOP was part of the national CCOF, the *Cadre de Coordination des Organisations Paysannes du Faso*, thereby "deepening" ROPPA's contacts. In November 2002, however, the government replaced the CCOF with the CPF, the *Confédération Paysanne du Faso*. It is estimated that this new national group includes 60% of the producer organizations in Burkina and 45% of the individual producers. The member organizations include: the FEPA/B, (*Fédération des Professionnels Agricoles au Burkina*); the UNJPA/B, (*Union Nationale des Jeunes Producteurs Agricoles du Burkina*); the UMPC/B, (*Union Nationale des Producteurs de Coton du Burkina*); the FENAFER/B, (*Fédération Nationale des Femmes Rurales au Burkina*); and the FEB (*Fédération des Eleveurs du Burkina*). Since this new national body, supported by the government, focuses on promoting export, and commodity oriented agriculture, FENOP with its orientation to family-based agriculture policy (consistent with ROPPA) stepped away from the CPF and established itself as a non-governmental organization.

5.3 Access to Agricultural Services, Disseminating Technologies and Information, and Managing Resources

For several years, it has been widely known that agricultural technology policy issues are not the top priority for producer organizations¹⁰. At the same time, various types of efforts to involve producers and producer organizations in agricultural research and information dissemination traces its roots in sub-Saharan Africa traces its roots at least back to the era of farming systems research during the 1980s. Without question, much remains to be accomplished. As a November 2002 World Bank sponsored workshop on Extension and Rural Development concluded, building the capacity of producer organizations is only one part of the puzzle. Attention must be given equally and simultaneously to building the capacity of the public sector, and service providers as well as linking

¹⁰ See Michael Bratton and R. James Bingen. 1994. "Farmer Organization and Agricultural Policy in Africa – Introduction." *African Rural and Urban Studies* 1,1: 7-30.

these efforts to the modernization of the agricultural education system¹¹. In other words, it is not just a question for ROPPA to attempt to build the capacity of producer organizations to demand agricultural technology and dissemination, or services. This effort must be integrated into a larger program of support and capacity-building in the public sector.

The most common approach – supported principally by the World Bank – across most of West Africa to encourage more “demand driven research” directly from farmers (and by implication from producer organizations) involves the establishment of regional users commissions or technical committees in the national decentralized (regionalized) agricultural research institutes. These regionalized bodies include representatives from a variety of categories of producers instead of producers as direct representatives of producer organizations. This is meant to keep the discussions oriented more toward technical rather than policy-related concerns. Moreover, interviews with commission members in Mali found that producer members do not discern a relationship between their position on the Commission and the membership in a producer organization¹². Consequently, part of ROPPA’s capacity-building agenda may need to include ways to help forge such connections if ROPPA seeks to help its member organizations in each country improve their role in gaining access to agricultural services, technology and information.

At the same time, experiences with the national research institute in Burkina Faso (INERA) to design and implement specific research programs in direct collaboration with producer organizations offer an alternative approach. Some of the experiences that bear further investigation include:

- INERA-FEPA-B for the adaptation and diffusion of maize, millet and cowpea (*niébé*) technologies.
- INERA-FNGN/NESTLE (*Fédération Nationale des Groupements Naam*) for experimentation and diffusion of cowpea, millet and vegetable crop technologies.
- INERA-FENOP for the experimentation and diffusion of maize and cowpea technology.
- INERA-UNCPC-B (*Union Nationale des Producteurs de Coton du Burkina*) for cotton research funded by the national cotton company, SOFITEX. (A similar arrangement exists in Mali.)

(Apparently similar arrangements are being negotiated between the Guinean (Conakry) national agricultural research institute, IRAG (*L’Institut de Recherche Agronomique de Guinée*) and producer organizations, such as the *Fédération des Pays du Fouta Djallon* (FPFD) for research on potatoes and onions.)

The experiences with Senegal’s National Agricultural Advisory Service, ANCAR (*Agence Nationale de Conseil Agricole et Rural*) and the establishment of the new, local coordinating committees, CLCOP, (*Cadres Locaux de Concertation des Organisations Paysannes*) offers another and different approach to this issue. In this arrangement, the expectation is that State services, local communal authorities, producer organizations and the private sector will consult on their development priorities. This will obviously create the need for considerable local level capacity-building in producer

¹¹ World Bank. 2003. “Extension and Rural Development – Converging Views for Institutional Approaches?” Workshop Summary. November 12-14, 2002. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

¹² See Jim Bingen, Diana Carney, Edmond Dembèlé. 1991. “The Malian Union of Cotton and Food Crop Producers: Its Current and Potential Role in Technology Development and Transfer.” ODI Agricultural Research & Extension Network. London: ODI.

organizations. In one cotton growing area in Senegal, for example, this type of consultation apparently has led not only to the creation of a new producer organization, the Union of Maize Growers in Saré Bidji (*Union des Producteurs de Maïs de Saré Bidji*), but to improved access to short-term production credit for the 30 member groups of this new union.

5.4 Other Capacity Issues

Uniformly across the sub-region, there is a very shallow pool of producer organization leaders. The few individuals who have benefited from support and investments over the past 10 years tend to be solicited for more remunerative opportunities with NGOs, international agencies and bilateral assistance programs. Continued extremely low levels of literacy may perhaps more profoundly continue to hinder most efforts to support producer organizations. Some groups, such as CLUSA, make literacy training the *sine qua non* for their production and marketing support programs, but this organization continues to be in the minority regarding this approach. As some newly retired civil servants return home to farm (one of the more interesting yet unexamined “benefits” of structural adjustment and early retirements from government downsizing), there is a new pool of “expertise” in the countryside that might strengthen the farmers movement in each country. Nevertheless, organizational and management skills are not generalized, thereby hampering the ability of most small producers to secure loans, seek alternative marketing channels, not to mention assuring organizational transparency and openness in financial oversight and accountability.

5.5 Anglophone West Africa

ROPFA does not currently cover producer organizations in the West African countries of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone or Liberia. Limited information about producer organizations in Ghana and Nigeria helps to illustrate some of the issues confronting ROPFA as it considers expanding its network into Anglophone West Africa.

5.6 Ghana

Only two groups, The Ghana National Association of Farmers and Fishermen, and the Cocoa Coffee Sheanut Farmers’ Association are listed as Associate Members of IFAP, the International Federation of Agricultural Producers. No information is available about these organizations or their relationship with IFAP.

For almost two years, FAO has been working to encourage the government to revise its Cooperative Act, to prepare a different set of regulations for producer organizations that are not cooperatives, and to prepare a policy regarding non-governmental organizations.

In short, there does not appear to be a clear-cut government commitment in Ghana to promoting cooperatives, producer organizations or the role for NGOs in supporting farmer-based programs. In addition, some evidence suggests that when the government does prepare its producer organization policies, the government agencies working with these organizations will require considerable capacity-building as well.

5.7 Nigeria

Recent policy documents addressing agricultural and integrated rural development policy do not address producer organizations. Moreover, producer organizations are not part of the soon to be published Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

Relatively few non-governmental organizations function in Nigeria to train members of associations in co-operative principles, to obtain access to more and better inputs, or to improve their business management skills. Similarly, the agricultural extension programs at the state and federal levels are not equipped to provide significant training or incentives for profitable co-operative activity.

Most producer associations or cooperatives establish themselves around a commodity or, in some cases, a production locality (e.g., in northern Nigeria, a *fadama*, or valley bottom, with rich soils that remains moist, or can be irrigated, for a second annual crop). Many of these groups may be federated up to the national level. For example, “primary” co-operatives are grassroots associations at the level of the village or a Local Government Area. “Secondary” co-operatives generally operate at the state level. Both register with the state government Department of Co-operative Societies. An “apex” co-operative is national and works directly with the Department of Co-operatives, a regulatory arm of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Despite this neatly defined organizational structure, the operational reality of cooperatives appears quite different. Individuals or cliques often co-opt the primary cooperatives for political gains. Similarly, the apex cooperatives often do not have the national authority, expertise or information that their names suggest. Furthermore, some commodities, such as cocoa, have more than one “national” producer organization vying for producer loyalty and policy support. In addition to this structure, there are two national associations of apex organizations, the All-Farmers’ Apex Association of Nigeria and the National Farmers’ Association of Nigeria, that group together 47 national commodity-based associations.

“Enclave projects” supported through the Department of Rural Development, (FMARD) encourage farmers to work project land cooperatively, provide land, inputs, land preparation, water and feeder roads, and thereby offer another opportunity for producers to act collectively. These projects promote profitable crops in each agro-ecological zone (e.g. cashew or oil palm), ensure a processing link, and focus on nutrition and HIV/AIDS. These do tend to be showcase projects and apparently are attractive to retired high-ranking civil servants and other privileged members of society.

6. MAJOR INITIATIVES SUPPORTING PRODUCER ORGANIZATIONS

The current producer organization networks in the sub-region, and ROPPA in particular, rely heavily on continued technical and financial support from a variety of Europe-based non-profit networks. The contribution of “membership” or participation by a handful of producer organization leaders for almost 20 years in these networks to the current status of regional networks cannot be overemphasized. The Europe-based groups provide critically important (but often overlooked)

opportunities for producer organization leaders to exchange ideas and information with each other and with supporters in Europe. In addition to promoting solidarity among producer groups in West Africa, these relationships are the source of ideas and assistance for tackling difficult policy and organizational issues. For example, ROPPA's capacity to formulate a UEMOA agricultural development strategy, as well as support for changing national policies to assure the juridical status of producer organizations, derives in no small way from the broader international backstopping through these Europe-based networks.

6.1 Réseau APM – Afrique

Supported largely by one foundation, Charles Léopold Mayer pour le progrès de l'Homme (FPH) this network was launched at Mbour, Senegal in 1995 to serve as a "space for reflection" among those working with, and supporting, farmers' associations in West Africa. It includes participants from Tanzania and Zimbabwe and a variable number of donors including the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union, IFAD, CTA and the Gaia Foundation.

Unlike many other support networks, APM-Afrique brings together a diverse group of actors, including representatives of a variety of types of farmers' associations (unions, associations, etc.), representatives from NGOs that support farmers' associations, and government agencies especially concerned about the role of farmers' associations in agricultural development policy and programs.

The networking activities of APM enhance its support role for producer organizations. For example, APM-Afrique is represented on the CGIAR NGO committee; it participates in the meetings of the Conference of Ministers of Agriculture for West and Central Africa (CMAOC); and, it participates in the FRBC Fund in Cameroon (*Fonds de recherche sur base compétitive au Cameroun*).

Over the last 10 years APM-Afrique support for food security and subsector work has included sponsorship of regional workshops on cotton, rice, cocoa and coffee, often in collaboration with types of support groups such as CIEPAC, IRAM, CIRAD and SOLAGRAL. Some of these include: a Cotton Workshop in Ségou, a Rice Workshop in St. Louis; Rural Training in Cameroon; Food Security in Bamako; World Meeting in Cameroon; a CIRAD-sponsored workshop on Producers Associations and the Disengagement of the State; and the *Observatoire Coton* Workshop in Bénin in 2000.

More specifically, APM-Afrique contributed directly to the emergence of groups such as the CNOP-CAM in Cameroon; the CROW in Gabon; the AOPP in Mali and the expansion of FUPRO in Benin.

The current APM-Afrique program focuses on:

- The UPAFA, or the *Université Paysanne Africaine*, with funding from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs for training producer organization leaders;
- Agrarian reform and land tenure projects in Cameroon, Senegal and Ghana in partnership with IFAD;
- GMOs and intellectual property rights; and,
- The *Programme Fédérateur de Recherché-Action*, or a peasant-farmer solidarity movement in response to globalization and linked with a comparable network activity in Latin America.

At its General Assembly meeting in May 2002 in Mbalmayo, APM-Afrique delegates expressed interest in exploring relationships between the network and farmers' organizations in each country, as well as establishing relationships with other networks, especially ROPPA.

6.2 IFAP/FIPA, The International Federation of Agricultural Producers

Established in 1946 “to secure the fullest cooperation between organizations of agricultural producers in meeting the optimum nutritional and consumptive requirements of the peoples of the world,” IFAP membership includes 100 national organizations of “family farmers” in 71 countries. Many members in sub-Saharan Africa are associate members.

The Federation sponsors several issues forums to develop policy briefs related to biotechnology, trade, poverty and land, environment and cooperatives. It also sponsors commodity groups to deal with issues concerning sugar, meat and feeds, dairy, grains and oilseeds. In addition it supports a separate committee on Women in Agriculture established in 1992. The purpose of this committee is to:

- Promote the status and situation of women farmers and their families all over the world;
- Empower women farmers through their full and effective participation in farmers' organizations at all levels, in decision-making bodies, and in IFAP activities;
- Enable IFAP to play a leading role in supporting member organizations' activities involving women, as well as in advocating women farmers interests throughout the international system.
- Encourage solidarity among women farmers, especially between industrialized and developing countries, and countries in transition.

An IFAP African Farmers Committee serves as a permanent forum where African farmers organizations meet and work together on a regular basis. This African Regional Committee last met in February 2001 in Cairo to address the theme of “Role of farmers' organizations in fostering economic cooperation and integration of African economies.” This committee also serves as the principal point of collaboration with ROPPA.

6.3 AgriTerra

Established in 1997 to promote, facilitate and support “lasting cooperation linkages” between rural people's organizations in the Netherlands (the LTO-Nederland and the regional LTO organizations, the Dutch rural women's organizations and their federation (CPVO), the National Cooperative Council for Agriculture and Horticulture (NCR) and the Dutch Agricultural Youth Organization (NAJK)0, Agriterra promotes direct farmer-to-farmer cooperation.

Linkage programs in West Africa include:

- Women from the National Federation of Agricultural Professionals (FEPA/B) Burkina Faso with the Catholic Women's Organization (KVO), and the Zij-Actief Limburg to focus on issues related to the division of labor and care-giving; economic independence; women in decision-making functions; and access to land;

- The Federation of Unions of Producers in Benin (FUPRO) Benin with the Agricultural Youth Association Friesland (AJF) and the Farmers' Organization of the Northern Netherlands (NLTO) for organizational strengthening; family farming; and cooperatives;
- The Union des Producteurs Privés and Union des Femmes Senegal with the Limburg Agricultural and Horticultural Union (LLTB) to deal with the position of rural women within FUGIAM; and
- Support for the Eastern Women's Cooperative Movement (EWCM) Sierra Leone to work on credit extension; institutional strengthening; from emergency aid to structural aid.

In addition Agriterra develops strong working relations with the international networks in which the participating Dutch rural membership organizations are actively engaged, and that also count members in developing countries, e.g., IFAP. Equally important, in 1999, Agriterra, together with the Association of Country Women of the World initiated a program of support for regional conferences and workshops, and the strengthening of the association.

7. POSSIBLE WARP/IEHA INVESTMENTS

7.1 ROPPA

While financial support to the regional fund will be important, it should be tied to providing various types of technical support to the Executive Committee and/or involvement on the Advisory Committee. In particular, such technical support to ROPPA could assist in:

- *Improving the technical capacity of ROPPA to help the national platforms of producer organizations achieve juridical recognition and legitimacy.*

This could involve financial support for ROPPA to convene national level workshops to address and resolve issues and to deal with the articulation between the national platforms and the regional organization. In order to develop this capacity, WARP could consider helping ROPPA design and carry-out a “capacity and representational assessment” (including access to and use of internet technology) of the member producer organizations that belong to the platform in each country. Such an issues-oriented inventory (in contrast to a collection of largely descriptive information of little programmatic use) would help ROPPA develop a “support strategy” for the national platforms as well as develop a support program (for external funding) more responsive the needs of producer organizations in each country. Such a strategy could involve the more effective use of internet communication technology that would help improve communications within the network, but also provide access to a wide variety of commercial and marketing information.

One separate part of such an inventory should include an assessment of the relationship of various producer groups in each country to the country’s Chamber of Agriculture, with specific attention to how these relationships offer opportunities for, or create constraints on national-level policy discussions. At the current time, very little is known about these “policy relationships” at national or even local levels in each country, and this information will be especially important if political and territorial decentralization is to become a reality throughout the sub-region.

A role for WARP. The FAO continues to support Chambers and several World Bank projects provide technical and financial support, but it is not clear that these support programs provide an effective voice for producers at local levels in each country. WARP could make an important contribution to strengthening producer organizations across the sub-region by

raising this issue in donor agency discussions. In addition, and in the context of a technical assistance program, WARP should consider the most effective means for contributing directly to the ROPPA regional fund managed through the West African Development Bank.

- *Defining specific policies and concrete programs consistent with the farm family orientation in contrast to thinking more narrowly about export crop production.*
Based on ROPPA's participation in UEMOA discussions, long-term and short-term technical assistance could be assigned to work with ROPPA staff to help improve their policy expertise on specified topics.
- *Thinking about the policy implications of a "rural livelihoods" approach in the new global context, including attention to the implications of HIV/AIDS.* This might involve the assignment of a short- or long-term consultant to help develop the necessary expertise. Such support could also focus on designing short-term production credit programs in each country. As the major export commodity programs become privatized, producer needs for access to this type of credit will increase.
- *Identifying an operational gender-based program.*
ROPPA could use short- and long-term technical assistance in order to develop this type of program and perhaps develop a strategy for supporting and working more closely with REFESA.
- *Defining a sub-regional literacy policy and strategy.*
Based on an up-to-date inventory based in part on the assessment described above, ROPPA could exercise sub-regional leadership in seeking increased funding for, and program attention to, local-level literacy programs.
- *Support for expanding ROPPA into the sub-region's Anglophone countries.* Financial and technical assistance could be considered to design and implement an inventory of the "state of producer organizations" in Ghana and Nigeria, and perhaps in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Similar to the capacity assessment described above, this inventory would need to focus on capacity and representation issues. But it should also specifically identify the network of national and international relationships (for marketing, technical and financial support, etc.) in which these groups operate.

7.2 REFESA

- WARP might consider convening a workshop to address specifically the issue of strengthening women's organizations in the sub-region. The evidence suggests that REFESA is largely a network in name only. Prior to identifying a specific technical and financial support program for the network, a policy and program workshop based on a "capacity and representational assessment" as described above, could contribute significantly to promoting a more dynamic and successful network among women's organizations. Such an inventory and workshop could be organized around a specific theme of continuing importance, such as women and land tenure.
- More specific support activities could focus on identifying the ways in which REFESA could become a sub-regional organization (beyond the CILSS member states), or dealing more specifically with organizational issues related to improved communications among various types of women producer organizations in each country and across the sub-region.

Specific recommendations related to links networks with agricultural extension services, agricultural research services, and agro-processors.

- Consideration should be given to the type of region-wide training that would be most appropriate for agricultural researchers and other agents to understand the dynamics and challenges of working with producer organizations. The agricultural research and sometimes the various types of “extension programs” in each country have established various types of consultative relationships with producer organizations. The World Bank is starting a review of these relationships that have been part of its recent programs in support of agricultural research and extension. In addition to following this evaluation, WARP could identify other collaborative activities (e.g., in Burkina Faso) supported through other donor programs. An important part of such a survey would involve identifying the conditions for, or characteristics of the “success story” collaborative efforts between producer associations and government agencies responsible for technology development and for dissemination. Attention might also be given to how these relationship can be used to provide more development of, and effective access to improved seed.

Since most of the on-going evaluations of these relationships will likely focus on the more structural features of these collaborative relationships, WARP could focus on the more dynamic and long-lasting contribution that would come from identifying why it is important professionally for researchers to work more collaboratively with producers, and subsequently creating the conditions to sustain such relationships.

Specific recommendations related to linking farmer groups to other services and determine how best to support and scale up such successes.

The relationships of West African producer organizations to various and overlapping international networks have been and will continue to be indispensable to their successes in each country and throughout the sub-region.

- WARP should give serious consideration to finding a appropriate and effective way to begin participating in some of these international networking and support groups such as the Brussels Group, or support for networks such as APM-Afrique.
- In order to expand beyond Francophone Africa, it might be useful to explore how INTERFACE might provide a link with producer associations in Nigeria. This should be based on a more specific assessment of the current organizational, operational and policy capacities of INTERFACE.